

Die Nazi Scum! At Andrew Edlin Gallery

by PADDY JOHNSON on *JANUARY 18, 2012*



Installation view, Die Nazi Scum! Soviet TASS Propaganda Posters at Andrew Edlin

A line of gallery goers huddled around Andrew Edlin this Saturday, eagerly asking questions about the 13 Soviet TASS war propaganda prints on display at the gallery. He'd simply stepped out of his office to say hello to a friend.

I suspect most of us knew they were made in the wake of Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 — the imagery makes that clear — but other details were more elusive. Were prints made from each poster? Did the red numbers in the upper right corner connote the edition number? How many posters were made in total?

As Edlin explained, in fact, no prints were made from the posters; 1,240 images were assigned runs of 100-500, each constructed assembly-line style. This was all done over the 1,418 days of war, made for display in storefront windows. Text was printed on separate sheets of paper and then affixed to the image, which was also rendered through extensive use of stencils. Paint was

applied quickly, giving these works an energy that would have been difficult to achieve using any other process.

In a catalogue essay produced by the gallery, Xenia Vytuleva explains that Okna TASS enjoyed a low degree of censorship (relatively speaking), and that there was a good deal of prestige associated with working for the group. To be an employee of TASS “meant being an artist of an entirely new type: a radical talent, a public person and a specialist in political and cultural work with the masses.” Unsurprisingly, some of Russia’s great creatives worked on these projects, including Pavel Sokolov-Skalia, Samuil Marshak, Osip Brik, Dem’ian Bednyi, and the group known as “Kukryniksy”.

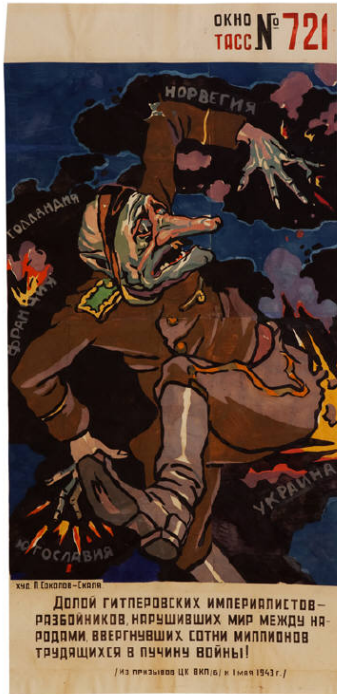
The progress of the war itself is made apparent by the imagery and the prints’ chronological production (as it turns out, the numbers in the upper-right corner denote the print number, not the edition). Spend enough time at Andrew Edlin Gallery and a narrative emerges: in the earlier prints, the Germans are the central figures, cast as bloodthirsty apes who die grisly deaths at the hands of Soviet patriots; in later prints, Soviet workers and soldiers assume triumphant poses, and Hitler appears mainly as comic relief. The Soviet Union’s eminent victory is manifest in the prints.

The exhibition was originally slated to close this weekend, but has now been extended through January 21st. I recommend it to everyone.



Die Nazi Scum!, installation view, 2011

This installation view gives a good sense of what the back gallery looks like. On the wall to the right, a squadron of bombers resembles an ominous black cloud. It’s one of my favorite pieces in the show, (though I find the nazi monkey really creepy).



Pavel Petrovich Sokolov-Skalia, Untitled, 67 x 32.125 Inches, stencil and gouache on paper 4/27/43

The man with the penis nose above appears more than once in this catalogue, a trademark of Sokolov-Skalia. No other artist succeeded in making the Nazis look quite so grotesque and despicable.



Pavel Petrovich Sokolov-Skalia and V. Lebedev-Kumach, 67 x 35 Inches, stencil and gouache on paper June 1942



Kukryniksy, Deadly Care, 62.5 x 33.5 Inches, stencil and gouache on paper 4/17/44

The above poster though, does give Sokolov-Skalia a run for his money.



Die Nazi Scum!, installation view



A. Plotnov, Gather All Harvest in Time, 58 x 33.75 Inches, stencil and gouache on paper

A symbol of Russian strength and beauty.